

Idaho State Boating Plan Update



IDAHO

**By Doug Strong
Boating Program
Supervisor**

Introduction

The last update to the Idaho Boating Plan was completed in February 1995. Program goals, objectives and implementation steps were generated at that time from survey information, public and agency input. In the 1995 plan, each goal had several objectives, and each objective had implementation steps identified to accomplish the objective. The status of each of the identified goals will be briefly discussed to demonstrate completion of the goal, to justify continuation, or to describe a new program direction.

Goal 1

Ensure grants and other funding are allocated in an effective, fair and responsive manner for the primary benefit of Idaho boaters involved in boating activities.

Status:

Procedures and rules are developed based on the relative need and capabilities of each providing agency and grant evaluation criteria is established to reflect the needs of boaters as indicated on surveys and other public involvement processes. Evaluation criteria are evaluated annually and changes made as determined to be necessary by staff and advisory committee members. Grant evaluation criteria were changed in 2001 to conform to other agency grant criteria and ensure a comprehensive review of all applications for funding.

The agency auditor for compliance with laws, rules and activities reviews County Vessel Accounts annually. All boating facility construction projects that are eligible for funding are reviewed to ensure compliance with laws, accepted construction methods and adequacy of the facility for the proposed purpose. All projects are reviewed by staff at their completion and approved if found to be satisfactory.

Training is provided annually for grant applicants regarding application procedures, availability of funds, evaluation criteria, laws and rules. Training is provided in at least three regions of the state prior to the grant application period. A list of grants awarded is published and distributed to the public and providing agencies at the completion of each grant cycle.

A statewide survey of recreational boaters was completed in 2000 to update previous survey information. A statewide conference on recreational boating in Idaho was held in 1994 and there are no plans currently in place to hold another. Communication with boaters, providing agencies, legislators and others is typically accomplished through statewide news releases, public service announcements on radio and television, statewide distribution of informational brochures, boating safety education classes and by marine law enforcement deputies. Boating staff attend annual training sessions defined in their work plans and participate in regional and national recreational boating organizations activities to stay current on recreational boating trends and issues.

Legal responsibilities and operation of county boating programs are defined in statute and rule. Brochures defining these requirements are distributed to county boards of commissioners, county waterways committees and county sheriff offices. These requirements are included and discussed at all grant workshops, boating education training, and annual marine law enforcement training.

After several years of quarterly publication of a newsletter, staff determined that a boating program newsletter published and distributed to registered boaters is impractical because of cost and staff time required. Program information is available to all boaters on the agencies Web site, is updated regularly and is readily accessible to anyone who wants it on the Internet.

All completed Waterways Improvement fund projects receive a sign indicating that the facility was funded in part or wholly by Waterways Improvement funds. The display of these signs is required in the grant contract and the sign is provided by the Agency.



Goal 2

Increase availability, access and multiple-use of waterways for recreation.

Status:

All state and federally funded projects are required to meet the requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act. Incentive points are added to applications that show evidence of meeting this requirement. Any upgrades of current facilities are also required to meet ADA standards and ADA construction guidelines are provided to applicants at grant workshops.

“A Guide to Idaho Boating Facilities” is no longer being published and distributed to boaters. Recreational boaters looking for information on where to go boating in Idaho can now access this information on the Agencies web site or at www.boatidaho.org.

Incentive points are awarded on Waterways Improvement fund grant applications to projects that show evidence of better dispersing boaters to reduce crowding and that provide sufficient area for launching and parking.

A chapter in the “Boat Idaho” home study course focuses on boat launching and retrieving etiquette and courtesy.

Little progress has been made in providing specific accessibility and facility development for manually propelled boats or in developing a separate “River Trails” program based on public input. The 2002 legislature passed a bill that established a new “Trout” license plate and a portion of the revenue will be distributed to Idaho Department of Parks and Recreation for projects that create access to waterways for manually propelled boats. The plates go on sale beginning January 2003.

The Idaho Department of Parks and Recreation Board approved in 2001 grant scoring criteria that is the same for all recreational grant programs administered by the agency. The waterways improvement fund, the RV fund and the off-highway vehicle grant programs use the same scoring criteria and encourage projects that develop multi-use facilities and activities that allow for cost sharing.

Goal 3

Provide for the safety of recreational boaters by increasing public compliance with boating laws and increasing the effectiveness of county marine law enforcement programs.

Status:

Boating Program staff provides annually a POST certified 80-hour marine law enforcement school. Additionally, staff supports marine law enforcement training in North Idaho that uses the same POST certified curriculum. In 2000, staff acquired POST certification to offer Officer Survival Training and Tactics. Training is offered annually.

County sheriff departments are eligible to receive a portion the Boat Safety Account funds received annually from the Coast Guard, based on a formula established by the agency, which are distributed once a MOU is signed by the county. An annual performance report is required at the end of the calendar year from each recipient county in order to maintain eligibility to continue to receive these funds.

Staff is available on request to assist with searches, recoveries and investigation of accidents. Staff also provides direct technical support, information and assistance with recovery of stolen vessels.

The agency funds several training opportunities a year for selected marine law enforcement personnel designed to increase the effectiveness of the local and statewide marine law enforcement program.

Goal 4

Prevent accidents and fatalities through public education, awareness and strategic communications.

Status:

Boating education instructor workshops are offered annually in the north and south regions of the state. All training material is provided and an incentive program is maintained designed to motivate certified instructors to remain active in the offering of basic boating education courses. All training material used meet national standards established by the National Association of Boating Law Administrators. Certified Boating Safety Instructors are recruited from county marine law enforcement personnel, US Coast Guard Auxiliary, and from schoolteachers.

Coordination of state boating education efforts is attained by staff attending regional and district meetings held by such partners as the U.S. Coast Guard and Coast Guard Auxiliary and U.S. Power Squadron. Program efforts are shared and discussion of new joint initiatives are identified and pursued as appropriate to promote safer recreational boating in the state.

The agency publishes and distributes printed material describing state boating laws and safety tips. *Idaho Boating Laws* is published annually and distributed to all boat license vendors, county boating programs, and boaters upon request. *Idaho Boating Laws and Rules* is updated and published annually and distributed to all county programs, county prosecutors and county magistrates. Other boating education material includes *Boat Idaho* a home study course, *Boating for Beginners* a course for children as well as related support material to include instructor manuals and instructional videos.

Goal 5

Reduce undesired or negative effects of boating on the environment.

Status:

The Agency manages federal funds available from the US Fish and Wildlife Service to fund the Clean Vessel Act. Funds are made available for the construction, renovation and maintenance of sewage pump-out and dump station facilities statewide. Most marinas and access sites in the state that would benefit from pump out facilities have added them since Clean Vessel Act funding became available in the state in 1994.

Education efforts to make boaters aware of the location of facilities and other environmental concerns are made available on the agencies web site and through the distribution of brochures. The home study course *Boat Idaho* includes a chapter on environmental issues for recreational boaters that meet national education standards. In the 2003 revision of this manual, information on Aquatic Nuisance Species will be added.

IDAHO

Goal 6

Seek resolutions to conflicts based upon input from users and agency representatives.

Status:

Information gathered from boater surveys, public contacts, agency advisory groups, agency contacts, legislators, boating accident reports, agency audits, and national trends are all used to propose changes in state boating laws and rules. In recent years, state boating laws have been changed to require individuals on personal watercraft to wear a life jacket, water skiers to wear a life jacket, children under the age of 14 to wear a life jacket, alcohol level for impairment has been reduced to .08, etc., are examples of laws changed as the result of this input.

National Issues and Implications

(From a study completed for the National Association of Boating Law Administrators by Responsive Management of Harrisonburg, VA)

1. Recreational boating in the United States is increasing along several distinct lines. While the number of boats as a percentage of the population is not, seemingly, increasing; the number of boats per boating household is increasing. In addition, the amount of time spent by recreational boaters is increasing, and the demand for additional time for boating is increasing. All of these factors lead to increased demands for and usage on public and private boating access, boating facilities, and boating supplies.

2. Boat ownership is increasing in certain areas. The number of boat ownerships by households that already own one boat has increased. This may be due to the increase in personal watercraft ownership, but the overall rate appears for boat owners to increasingly own more than one boat.

3. The majority of recreational boating in the United States is done in open motorboats under 26 feet in length. This is true for Idaho where boats under 16 feet in length are the most commonly used craft in recreational boating. Boat ownership has increased in specific areas in recent years; this is probably associated with increased income. Personal watercraft ownership has increased remarkably, but they still represent a minority of recreational boaters. Most recreational boating takes place on freshwater lakes or impoundments. Recreational boaters are fairly avid in that the average number of boating days is 17, and the average number of hours per day boating is 5.

4. Inconsistent registration requirements confound the accurate description of boating demographics. Standard codified boating registration and accident reportage would increase the accuracy of analysis of boating participation and accident rates. This is the case in Idaho where manually propelled boats are not required to register.

5. The demographics of recreational boaters mirror the national population in many areas. White males represent a larger group than others,

but not as much as some other types of outdoor recreation, such as hunting and fishing. Income is correlated to boating recreation and boat ownership in the middle to upper income levels. There is a correlation between education and participation in recreational boating. Those with graduate or professional degrees and college graduates are slightly more likely to participate in recreational boating. Ethnic minorities are under-represented in boating and boat ownership, but the reasons for this are unclear, although income-related reasons are possible.

6. Recreational boating is closely tied to fishing. Over 80% of recreational boaters also fish. This connection is found throughout the various issues of satisfaction, ownership, accidents, and education. An interesting aspect is that fishing nationally is stable to declining, but boating is increasing. It remains to be seen whether or not the fishing segment of boating participation is increasing. Recreational boaters take part in many outdoor activities, some associated with boating and some not.



7. Although the issue of access has been raised as a negative in recreational boating, little evidence suggests that a lack of access is anything other than a local issue. The research does not suggest that issues regarding access or boating facilities from a national perspective are displacing recreational boaters.

8. Recreational boating satisfactions do not come from the physical characteristics of boats or boating. Rather, satisfactions from recreational boating, as in other types of outdoor recreation, tend to be about naturalistic experiences, rest and relaxation, and social issues around friends and family. The implications of these observations about satisfactions, motivations, and benefits of recreational boating are profound. The fact that naturalistic experiences, being with friends and family, relaxation, and other less tangible reasons are of primary importance, and proximal factors such as costs,

challenge, physical characteristics of boats, boat performance, and others are of less importance need to be carefully considered in the development of management and marketing plans.

9. Attitudes and opinions toward recreational boating by agency personnel are largely unknown. Inferentially, it would seem that some fish and wildlife agency personnel do not place as much importance on boating recreation enhancement, or boating enforcement than on other issues such as game and fish. However, these attitudes need to be assessed in a comprehensive study.

10. The issue of a theoretical carrying capacity for recreational boating centers on the physical and social carrying capacity. Another issue is the biological or environmental carrying capacity of a body of water for recreational boating. These issues are highly complex and appear to be a function of local conditions and cultural characteristics of boaters using the area. There does not appear, at this time, to be a general model for carrying capacity.

11. There is need for standardization in the reporting of recreational boating accidents. A full analysis of the data is confounded by variations in estimates and methods of record keeping. However, if recreational boating fatalities, accidents and injuries are taken as a percentage of numbered boats, then their number remained stable since 1994. As far as transportation safety is concerned, recreational boating fatalities and accidents remains second only to traffic accidents.

12. Recreational boating fatalities occur primarily in boats under 26 feet in length. Capsizing, swamping, or flooding of the boat are also factors. Alcohol is found in fair number of accidents. The use of PFDs and mandatory boater education would appear to be factors that could reduce fatalities.

13. Among boating fatalities involving hunters and anglers, over 80% are from drowning. A very high percentage involves capsizing, swamping, and /or flooding the boat. Most accidents are with open motorboats less than 16 feet in length. Anglers and hunters aged 30-50 years old are at highest risk. The use of alcohol and failure to use a PFD is increasing.

14. The actual use of PFDs in any given group and for all recreational boaters needs to be studied empirically. There is a need for a national survey of PFD use based on actual observation and count, not reports by boaters.

15. Participation in boating safety education is declining as a percentage of the boating population. Over 80% of boat operators have not taken a boating safety course. While most boaters do not participate in boating safety courses, they do participate in basic first aid, water safety, or rescue courses at a higher rate than that of the general population. Recreational boaters favor mandatory boating safety and operator licensing, but few feel they personally need either. Recreational boaters are more likely to favor mandatory requirements for new boat operators, especially personal watercraft operators. Mandatory licensing, boating safety, and other education are problematic issues. Most Recreational boaters seem to favor it, but the logistics of implementation will be difficult for state and federal governmental agencies.

State Trends

State Recreational Boating Trend Information for Idaho provided by Responsive Management under a grant From the Aquatic Resources (Wallop-Breaux) Trust Fund administered by the U.S. Coast Guard.

The following trend data is provided to compare Recreational Boating Patterns from 1995 to a projection for 2013. The information has been researched and compiled by Responsive Management for planning use. Complete copies of the documents referred are available upon request.

1. Populations Projections for Idaho range from just over 800,000 in 1995 to a projection of 1,232,000 in 2013.

2. Projected number of numbered boats is just over 60,000 in 1995 to 116,000 in 2013.

3. Projected numbers of motor boating participants range from about 170,000 in 1995 to 248,000 participants in 2013.

4. Projected number of boater trips for motor boaters will range from about 1,400,000 in 1995 to 1,889,000 trips in 2013.

5. Projected number of boater days motor boating will grow from 1,600,000 in 1995 to 2,412,000 days in 2013.



The trends indicated for Idaho mirror the trends calculated for the nation. Simply stated, all projections indicate that participation in recreational motor boating will continue to grow along with the population and number of registered boats. Motor boating has been used in this analysis as a conservative estimate of all boating participation.

In another study completed by Responsive Management, Boating Professionals attitudes toward the future of boating in the United States were surveyed. The study was conducted for the National Association of Boating Law Administrators (NASBLA) through a series of interviews with

IDAHO

representatives of NASBLA, state agency boating law administrators, heads of national boating associations, and representatives of the Coast Guard and boat builders. The goal was to identify boating issues, priorities and concerns that are most important among the recreational boating community and its leadership.

A summary of the issues, in rank order of percentage of individuals giving these issues a 'high', or 'extremely high' priority rating, are listed below. Beneath each issue are the top three explanations of the current problems or future solutions that respondents' felt best illustrated their position that the issue was of "high" or "extremely high" importance.

- Boating Safety Education. (86%)
- Need for more safety education and funding, n=64
- Safety education reduces fatalities and accidents, n=34
- Need for mandatory safety education and licensing, n=24
- Boating safety and accidents. (82%)
- Improve safety education/training, n=51
- Other safety and accident concerns, n=27
- Improve enforcement, regulation and reporting, n=18
- Boating Access and facilities. (77%)
- Improve boating access, n=39
- Improve maintenance and quality of facilities, n=23
- Expand facilities, n=13
- Boaters' use of life jackets or PFDs (75%)
- Educate boaters about PFD use and risks, n=27
- Mandate PFD use, n=24
- PFDs are effective when used, n=19

There are twelve more issues identified in rank order identified by professional, however, showing the top four issues here demonstrates the trend in thinking from a national perspective. How does this compare to what Idaho boaters think are the important issues?

The Future of Boating in Idaho

Many of the Goals and Objectives identified in the February 1995 Idaho State Boating Plan are still useful today and will provide ongoing direction for efforts to promote safe and enjoyable boating on state waters. Since the completion of the 1995 plan, there have been significant numbers of national issues that directly effect recreational boating in Idaho. The National Association of State Boating Law Administrators (NASBLA) along with organizations like the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB), have provided significant leadership in identifying actions that need to be adopted by individual states to provide for a safer recreational boating experience. The NTSB has developed a "most wanted" list of actions for states to further decrease serious accidents and deaths nationally and within individual states. Idaho has satisfied several concerns on the NTSB "most wanted" list to include required life jacket use on personal watercraft, when water skiing, and by children 14 years of age and younger on boats 19 feet or less in length.

Mandatory Boat Safety Education is still on the NTSB's "most wanted" list for Idaho and is an issue that will need to be addressed within the next five years. NASBLA adopted model language for Mandatory Boat Safety Education in 1999, and many states have passed legislation since that time to require boaters to take a basic boating class to receive a certificate, which then allows them to use the waters of their state in a motorized vessel. Idaho will soon be surrounded by states that have such a requirement. Oregon passed a mandatory education law in 2000, Nevada passed a law in their last legislative session that becomes effective in January of 2003, and both Utah and Washington will have bills before their legislature in 2003. Canada has a national requirement for all citizens to pass a basic boating safety course that applies to anyone using Canadian waterways. The NTSB has assigned a staff person to work with Idaho in 2003 to encourage action be taken on this issue. The question is not if we should pass such a law in Idaho, but when.



Registration of manually propelled boats is another issue that won't go away in the next five years and must be in any future boating plan. Idaho currently registers around 84,000 motorboats and sailboats in the state, and conservative estimates indicate that there are over 100,000 manually propelled boats, such as row boats, canoes, kayaks, inflatable boats, etc., that are exempt from registration. These exempt boats use the same facilities and services that are paid for by motorboat registration and aren't paying anything into the system. Recreational kayaks, as an example, is the fastest growing segment of retail boat sales in the country according to the American Canoeing Association. They are easy to paddle, easy to transport and inexpensive to buy. They still require access facilities, they are often involved in accidents that require rescue by marine law enforcement personnel and they are easily stolen, which requires law enforcement follow up for recovery. All these facilities and services are currently paid for by motorboat registrations. Over the last ten years, over 60% of the reported boating fatalities in the state have occurred in manually propelled boats. In the 2002 boating season there were only two recreational boating fatalities in the state, both in manually propelled boats on moving water. The increased popularity and number of these boats on Idaho's rivers and lakes is only growing and must be addressed in the next five years.